The Islamic Republic is here to stay.

Unless something unforeseen happens, the Islamic Republic of Iran will remain in power, but may progressively become less Islamic over time.

by Hussein Redhaoui

A note by the author: I am by no means a complete expert on domestic affairs in Iran, nor am I Iranian, but at the same time, I am quite familiar with the domestic situation in Iran, and hope to prove this to the dear readership.

After about a few days of protests, turned into two concurrent weeks of riots, we might be able to pronounce two things: one being that this episode of riots is over, given the passing of a night in Iran without large gatherings of opposition in the major cities (Tehran, Mashhad, Qom, Esfahan, Tabriz, etc.) and major crackdowns on rioters, and second, that the Islamic Republic is indeed, against the designs of the Washington-Tel Aviv consensus, and to the despair (or perhaps among some, better put as 'annoyance') of many Iranians, going nowhere, here to stay, and not flying to Moscow anytime soon. Although it may seem as though this is a triumphal statement, it isn't, and is rather a sober reality to be *adjusted* to (Key word is *adjusted* because this is a state of affairs to be expected to remain with more solidity than previously thought). What should now be the focus for those of us concerned about Iran, and above all, Iranians themselves, should be the trajectory, and expectations about the future of the Islamic Republic, as it projects its power against a battered, divided opposition, and pleasantly hesitant foreign backers. That is, what it might look like in five, ten years from now, what opportunities for transformation might present themselves, where might future agents of change come from, and what societal frustrations and crises might instantiate themselves through these agents of change?

What motivates me to ask these questions is precisely that these questions aren't being asked in most analyses about Iran. Many treatments field Iran as a mere node of geopolitical power playing, consistently bound to the *now*, responding in live-time, without consultation for the longue duree of perhaps ten or fifteen years from now. Which is understandable, as the country is indeed a power player, especially after the June war in which it won back a damaged Arab street, and its relevance is gaining with each passing day amidst tumults in our West Asian region, not really known for consulting the longue-duree. But what I see the most is that it's treated as though it has no domestic, internal *trajectories*. No *trends*, no expectations that can be calculated, maintained. A lot of discourse on Iran follows its ability to go blow-for-blow with the Zionist occupation, or, on the other side, its impending collapse before an empowered and fed-up nation. Following from that, most of the conversation surrounding Iran is inevitably colored by not so much caring for what forms agents might take on as adapting to the system, but rather, whether the republic will weather an impending chaotic war. What the recent riots and their sudden conclusion offer us is finally, the opportunity to look back at previous, similar episodes in

recent Iranian memory, and assemble a working theory as to why the Islamic Republic is more resilient than we thought. I think for this, the best place to start would be a ‘balance sheet’, as it were, of the most riots. 2009, 2022, and now, 2025. Let’s start backwards.

Events of 2026

The recent events began in late December of 2025, almost on the eve of the New Year, and unlike other protests, as many analysts and commentators have duly noted, they were not organized by students or student-aged people, and they were not caused by election fraud such as in 2009, or the murder of a civilian, such as Mahsa Amini’s killing in 2022. They were caused by a rather quotidian (but as Marxists, our ears should perk up when we hear this) outrage over hyperinflation, a wildly unstable exchange rate, and high import prices due to sanctions. And protests originally began in Tehran, organized by ‘Bazaaris’; shopkeepers, money-changers, and suppliers, the pillars of the national service economy. Although Monarchists (supporters of the Shah, ousted in 1979) were unsuccessful in instigating protesting Bazaaris, at times being exposed, and physically thrown out or shouted down, an opportunity to protest was sympathized by those citizens of Iran’s western, mostly Kurdish and Arab, provinces. It did not take long before rioting mysteriously spread in cities such as Malekshahi, Kermanshah, and Ilam, with many armed, firing indiscriminately at other civilians come to join, as well as towards riot police, firefighters.

Rioting persisted for much longer, as the government, on Sayyed Ayatollah Khamenei’s pronouncement, gave endorsement towards protests, ostensibly by Bazaaris and other non-violent sympathizers, while condemning rioting that by then, had set fire to hospitals, banks, masjids, supermarkets, shops, firetrucks, buses, police stations, and cars. The government was unusually hesitant to crack down, perhaps on their nerves about unscrupulously publicized blueprints towards a regime change by Trump and infamous war criminal Benjamin Netanayahu, done in the grim shadow of the barely-gone, barely-*arrived* event of President Maduro’s abduction. As a matter of fact, more law enforcement officials had fallen in the early days of rioting than civilians. By this point, counter-protests, a rare sight, were mounting in cities not known as centers of support for the Islamic Republic, as violence perpetrated by rioters inflicted more casualties and property damage than originally expected by at-first sympathetic protestors, and perceptions of the rioting as foreign-backed became further widespread after the shooting death of a three-year-old child by separatists.

By this point, the peak had been reached (*Intel on Iran* reports a peak of ~7,000 across the nation), while non-violent arrests were successful in subduing many towns previously engaged in rioting. But, what was truly unexpected was the degree to which it had effectively repelled popular participation and identification. And perhaps, necessarily so, given the class origin of the protests that many similar accounts may fail to account for. While economically-motivated

protests are no stranger to internationally-sanctioned Iran, having given the impetus for public outcry in 2020, 2017, and 2019, this protest was significant in that it took place in the context of an ever-more directly challenged Iran, with its population more wary of foreign interference in the wake of the June war, which against all expectations, galvanized the nation in a rally similar to the 1980 defiance of Iraq's invasion. Merchants, owners of shops, stores, supermarkets, exhausted by the Pezeshkian government's currency and exchange rate policies that made borrowing and long-term planning impossible, could be said to have 'a horizon of demands', which were, *put vaguely*, sanctions relief, reform of the central bank, and consistency to the exchange rate. Immediate, quotidian demands, corresponding to the needs of merchants, and beneficial to the needs of the greater public as a whole. *Possibly* expandable into anti-government demonstrations, given the right push, the right 'sell', the 'right' sort of response from the government and motivating factors, but not *inherently* so.

What should interest us, as commentators, analysts, planners, is how horizon-ed off these demands seem to be, as practically displayed by publicized disavowals of anti-government instigation. As a class that meets face-to-face in public stands, and that rallied behind the government amidst the June war, there was a tacit understanding that the demands must be 'conservative' enough, so as to not earn the eye of foreign adversarial provocateurs on one side, which would forever imperil their livelihoods, or brutal government repression on the other, which may do the same. When it became immediately apparent that these protests would, irregardless of attempts by *Bazaari*s, attract foreign attention, and commentary by adversaries abroad, merchants simply gave up, and decided that if the confrontation was to be between foreign instigators, which had made their presence felt during the June war (It is damagingly underreported that much of the path towards the Zionist occupation's war on Iran was cleared by proven collaborators operating drones and jammers), and the Islamic Republic, who were bearable to say the least, they would take the side of the Islamic Republic, either as a quietist bystander at home, or as a sympathizer in a pro-government rally. The horizon for these demands was still present, as these problems continue to rock Iran and make life difficult for millions in the country. But the horizon for their expression was closed off, as the understanding imperceptibly shifted, among many who were appalled at the scale of violence amidst government restraint, towards one of public demonstration being thoroughly compromised. It seemed to many as though a genuine opportunity for voicing demands for change in the direction of the country had been spoiled, and that the future of demanding change was, at least for the short-term, forfeited, as long as foreign adversaries preyed upon these as opportunities for regime change.

Comparison to 2022, 2009, Takeaways

Of course, there was a market of reasons for why lower-rung analysts abroad insisted that this might be the end of the 'regime', that vaunted word lobbed by the regimes of the world. Among them was the understanding that this was part of a pattern, a precedent in fact, of yearly-succeeding consecutive protests, and a larger meta-narrative to the stability and institutions of 'revolutionary governments'; Post-1979 Iran being, lest we forget, the product of a *hijacked* revolution itself. This prima facie symmetry was not lost on more sophisticated analysts, who issued observations that much like the way the Islamic Republic came to power, it might tumble from it and be replaced in a similar fashion. Hence, the necessity I believe in for taking to task some of these understandings, and putting forward an alternative chronology.

2022 in many respects indicated the ripening of a will to confront the government on a terrain previously only scaled and observed since 2009. After the martyrdom of Mahsa Amini at the hands of popularly-mobilized security enforcement, thousands took to the street, and millions more *within* the country expressed hope and solidarity with protestors and the burgeoning "*Zan*, *Zendegi*, *Azadi*" (Women, Life, Freedom) movement promoted by voices both within and outside the nation. Public expression of opposition re-entered the mainstream with a new spectrum, and with a new set of social consequences; the mandatory veiling was no longer observed, and no longer policed by specially tasked 'vice' police, and major reformist outlets shrugged off previous taboos when discussing the government. Yet, although foreign coverage and adversaries deeply invested coverage and presence in the movement, not wanting to miss an opportunity to land a blow at a powerful force in the region, it did not result in an existentially-determining outcome, and its consequences were rather, absorbed, by the Islamic Republic. The Islamic Republic was authoritarian, but it was not rigid, and this came as a blow to foreign parties; some as so much expecting the 'collapse' of the government.

Less is paid attention to the consequences of the *Zan*, *Zendegi*, *Azadi* movement domestically than is distributed to, at times, the ruefully enjoyed failed expectations of malicious foreign actors. Needless to say, many young participants in the movement emerged dejected and disappointed from the inconclusiveness of the protests. There joined a sense that although socially, much had been 'won', nothing had been so decisively won that wasn't an absorption by the status quo. And while there had been negative demand such as 'the end of the Islamic Republic, equality for women, and freedom of political conscience and for prisoners', there were painfully contrary competing *positive* visions of what precisely should come after the Islamic Republic. The fact of competition, much of the time vitriolic and intensely hateful, did not inspire confidence among sympathetic bystanders within the country, and in fact, did the opposite. Iran was, it is remarked often but without the substantial attention to the depth of the fact, *relatively stable* compared to its neighbors, and in fact, birthed its prestige as a regional power due to its ability to identify, capitalize, and preserve dynamics in the region that extended its interests.

In the late 2000s and early 2010s, Iran appeared to the rest of the world as a rock-star of nuclear science and force projection, at a time when Iraq was as yet suffering from the multiple afflictions of American occupation, Jihadist terrorism, and the Sadrist movement, Lebanon woke up on the brink of collapse everyday due to the Neoliberal post-Ta'if accord 'experiment' and fearless confrontations of Hezbollah, and the Arab world as a whole experienced what many analysts are correct in labelling the '1848' of its own. The story of how this springtime of nations morphed into a horrific monster is well-relayed, and its implications were not lost, to say the least, on those Iranians who were 'bystanders' to the event of the Islamic Republic's ideological, domestic, and regional dominance. There was a very reasonable hesitation to hurry an uprising against the government, especially so given Iran's under-appreciated diverse ethnic composition, each appended to the borders of the nation as an inheritance of the Qajars' imperial days. Whereas the *Zan*, *Zendegi*, *Azadi* movement brought together, albeit ineffectively, different sections of what passed for *Persian* opposition to the government, there were other projects of opposition that didn't so much as require being umbrella'd, as they were rather organic. That is, ethnic separatism among a portion of the nation's Kurds, Azeris, Baluchis, and Arabs, whose racism and violent rhetoric that is accessory to chauvinist ethnic separatism is no stranger to other Iranians.

2009's protest movement brought to the mainstream many of these sentiments, as it represented the torch that would be passed to 2022; disillusionment and frustration with the electoral process and participatory democracy. Where many are bystanders now, the same had been protesters then, as for the first time, a popular figure that inspired change and grassroots appreciation, Mir-Hussein Musavi, was shunted out of consideration by Iran's deep-seated *Sepah-e-Pasdaran* establishment. But this outcry at a public demand denied unleashed many a long-unplatformed voice to the mainstream, among them separatists, and again, long incumbent voices in the opposition that relished the spotlight shone by War on Terror era coverage, such as Monarchists, and supporters of the M.E.K, which for their status as taboos among much of the young protestors and the then-generation's older bystanders, were not so ready to be welcomed back into rehabilitation. Then, naturally unlike 2022, the demands were for the election of Musavi, the end of Ahmadinejad's illegitimate presidency. Unlike 2026, the demands were 'horizon-ed' off because this was the first time there had been a frustration at the level of massive participatory democracy, and they corresponded to the demands of the popular Reformists. If any at the time demanded the fall of the Islamic Republic, it would be their first time demanding it. And as is well-known, the first time never goes quite as planned.

Fatal Strategies, Tactical Vulnerabilities

The attempt to make Iran's 2026 into Iraq's 1991 has by all means failed. What I mean by this is, similar to how immediately after the loss of the First Gulf War by Iraq, uprisings rashed upon southern and northern Iraq by the repressed Shi'a and Kurds, perhaps it was looked to by 'the designers' in Washington and occupied Tel Aviv as a blueprint for what these riots may be instigated into being; a disastrous status-quo-altering uprising on top of a *perceived* military victory. And rather unlike the 1991 uprisings in Iraq, the opposition in the eyes of many has been thoroughly discredited, and was long on its way to discrediting by the public even before, as evidenced by anti-monarchist rallies (anti-*monarchist*, not necessarily pro-*government*) within Iran. Herein lies what I call the 'fatal strategy' of Persian, non-separatist opposition camps, that positioned them for domestic disapproval, and it is quite obvious, though veiled to many…

The fatal strategy was simply being foreign-backed. Although declaimed by many as simply a pro-Islamic Republic jacket, it is no mystery, and was even publicized by public officials in America and regime leaders in the Zionist occupation, that they are completely on the side of the opposition. We don't even need to say that in the eyes of Iranian 'bystanders', that equates to being on the side of rioters, masjid-burners, child-killers, and shop-looters. But on a more complex level seldom appreciated, while this perception corresponds to a reality, and is painfully (or at times pridefully, recalling here calls to attack Iran made by supporters of the Shah) admitted by opposition, it is not so much understood that this strategy rarely, rarely pays well. Put simply, being supported by foreign powers does not work if said foreign powers are fearful of attacking your enemy. Not only would the opposition be exposed for being allied to a national enemy, but the opposition can be disposed of by that national enemy during a moment requiring crucial solidarity, and must suffer from the structural consequences to the movement of being disposable.

For example, it was published recently amidst the rioting that Trump did not express confidence or even seriously consider the claimant to the imperial throne 'Reza Pahlavi' as a candidate for installation after regime change. With friends (United States and the Zionist occupation) like these, who needs enemies (Islamic Republic)?

And it plays to the consistent reality that America and the Zionists, at the level of their staff and policy coordination, do not have Iran as a priority to afford it the careful consideration of not simply 'throwing opposition to a wall and seeing who sticks', which was effectively being done to Iranian opposition. The two powers prioritize the bare incapacitation of Iran, its removal from our West Asian equation, and not much beyond that. Whoever comes into office after the bloodbath is simply a handshake, as the post-Assad habilitation of former Al-Qaeda commander Al-Julani shows us.

Given these circumstances, we might be able to sketch a broad outline of the situation that otherwise sympathetic bystanders find themselves in. If any and all public expression of discontent becomes an opportunity for destruction not to be passed up by foreign adversaries, political expression becomes foreclosed, and opinion becomes wary and unduly pro-government. The understanding then becomes that if there is going to be any change, it definitely will not come from outside the country, and more than definitely will not come from the aforementioned bystanders, who recognize their participation is compromised. The potential for change, then, shifts further inward, and is decidedly issuant from 'within'; that is, the Islamic Republic and its array of civil institutions. It is then, from there that political change will be clamored for, and it is those institutions that will transform into perches for dissent, in much the same way parliamentarians in Post-Mubarak 2012 Egypt did, when the opinion of the square became contested and passion forestalled. And it is from here that we might diverge, and begin our speculation on what might attend the political destiny of Iran.

The Future of Iran

As previously stated, given the public acquiescence to the apparent 'stability' the Islamic Republic affords contra foreign adversaries, the monopoly on activism and agency lies within the establishment and those who play by its rules, and not with the opposition. The possibility of change in the Islamic Republic, then, hinges on a silent, less flashy crisis, that will slowly empower establishment actors. This crisis being of course a demographic one. As it stands, the composition of Iran's clergy is old, and ridiculously old; some Iranians joke that prominent government hardliners like Jannati 'was with Imam Ali back in the day', referring to the 7th century semi-historical religious hero of the Shi'a faith. Sayyed Ayatollah Khamenei himself is 89 years old, and suffers from prostate cancer. Within the next few years, we may see retirements and funerals for those clerics who themselves led the clergy during the Iranian revolution in 1979, and made it into the expressly *Islamic* revolution. As this process unfolds, an actor already deeply present and entrenched in all facets of Iranian economy and society will emerge through new appointments, dismissals, forced retirements, and other similar levers of policy and institutions; the previously mentioned Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, or *Sepah-e-Pasdaran*, abbreviated going forward to its Persian name, the *Sepah*. In effect, this means the taking over of the reins by a more economically-minded, relatively younger military and economic establishment, with the privileging of a domestic state-bonded oligarchical elite (in other words, a *national bourgeoisie*). A number of consequences follow from this.

Firstly, as power shifts towards the *Sepah*, a tug-of-war will occur between them and the clerical establishment as both parties struggle over policy directions. It is in this phase where compromises and concessions will occur over the endurance of institutions like the Council of Experts, Expediency Council, Council of Guardians, the authorities vested in the *Basij*, the *Sepah*'s grassroots popularly mobilized security enforcement force, amendments to the constitution of the Islamic Republic and authorities, immunities, vested in the clergy, and possible changes to the nation's approach to 'vice'. Doubly so with regards to reformists, as the *Sepah* can be expected to crack down as it maneuvers between a clergy being dispossessed, and an empowered reformist movement.

Secondly, news media outlets in Iran, and reformists, will echo the voice of 'the silent majority' that the *Sepah* cannot ignore, which is a voice long wanted by many and may finally have the opportunity of appearing: calls for a 'secular republic', sans Shah, sans *Rahbar-e-Mo'azzam*, without amendments to Iran's foreign policy of power projection and regional predominance. This will increase once more public faces, and infamous clerics, begin to die of old age, as the integrity of the Islamic Republic and the ideology that birthed it is questioned in light of the exit of the generation who were the public faces of its brand. It is the context of this inevitable conversation that will provoke the *Sepah* into renegotiating the prominence of Islamic Republic ideology, and may steer it in the direction of more explicitly nationalistic messaging and practice,

and this will be something the next *Rahbar-e-Mo'azzam* will have to contend with. Whoever that may be, how they deal with the shake-up will be the grounds for the *Sepah* to extend its power as an institution, and degrade the authority of the office of the *Rahbar-e-Mo'azzam*.

Thirdly, de-dollarization may pick up, as the chain of command in political and financial offices changes hands to nimbler public officials vested with economic interests, seeking to insulate themselves from the crises that plague the Islamic Republic currently with regards to its oscillating exchange rate, import pricing, and consumer prices. This will implicate more concrete non-military steps to further integrate the markets of allies such as Russia and China.

Fourthly, and for the region, powers nearby will have to contend with a situation in which the Islamic credentials of Iran come under scrutiny by allies such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, and the Popular Mobilization Units in Iraq, as Iran affords less ideological alignment and projection. Iran however will not leave Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, or Yemen, as those remain key to its power projection. It may rather embark on a detente with regard to powers such as Turkey and Saudi Arabia, if the Kingdom determines that a de-ideologized Iran proves a reliable partner.

And finally, and perhaps the consequence most earning of being the concluding one: It will be much, *much* harder to dislodge Iran from West Asia. If the Islamic Republic was 'fledgling' in *this state*, a de-ideologized 'Islamic' Republic will be unstoppable, as it will have recruited the exhaustion of foreign opposition, the hesitation of foreign adversaries, and the ambivalence, apathy, or satisfaction of the 'silent majority'. Much of what was unvoiced by the silent majority, the aforementioned 'bystanders', has an opportunity to make itself heard given the firm discrediting of the opposition, the decoupling of political opinion from the interests of foreign adversaries (given that siding with the government affirms a tacit approval of nationalism and foreign policy), and the resilience of the Iranian nation between the two wars. And for that, the voice *will* make itself heard, and the people's adversaries can only fail.

Dedicated to Melina Asadi, the three-year-old martyr of Kermanshah, and all of the 1,000 martyrs of the June war.